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## <News> Human baby killed by Gombe chimpanzee

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**<NEWS>****Human Baby Killed by Gombe Chimpanzee**

*Shadrack Kamenya  
Gombe National Park*

At Gombe National Park, Tanzania, a tragic incident occurred on the 15th of May, 2002. A human baby, 14 months old, was kidnapped and killed by an adult male chimpanzee.

The mother and her baby were coming into Gombe from their village of Mgaraganza which is outside the National Park. She was accompanied by her niece, aged 16, who was carrying the baby. They were walking on a public footpath which runs through the Park, and about 11:20 am, when they were still about three kilometers away from the research camp at Kasekela, they passed through the forest near the shore at Kahama. They had just crossed a small dry gully, when they came unexpectedly on the alpha male of Kasekela community, Frodo, just 4 metres from the path, where he was feeding on oil-palm fronds on the ground.

The chimpanzee approached the two women, and at that distance they had no time to run and were too weak to do anything to protect their child, so he took the baby from the girl's back, and moved off into the forest. When he was next seen, by one of the researchers, he was in a tree and the baby was dead, but after eating only a

little portion he left the baby on a branch, descended the tree, and moved away, apparently to avoid the observer. Luckily the male was alone with no other chimps around, and so the researchers were later able to retrieve the baby's body.

The fact that members of the public are allowed to use paths through the park, and the fact that some of those people have not remained alert to the danger from chimps, were contributory factors to this incident. We are continuing to enforce the safety rules as well as explaining to staff and to visitors what the risks are and how to avoid them.

Frodo is not scared of people and sometimes includes them in his displays, by hitting or pushing them, but researchers and Park guides can usually tell by the signs that he is going to do this, and help people to avoid him. This aspect of his behaviour is in a way like play, but of a rough sort. However, Frodo's behaviour during this incident seemed more to be part of the natural hunting behaviour of chimpanzees: it seems they can view human babies just as they view the young of other species such as colobus monkeys and baboons, as potential prey. This was not the first case of human babies being taken by chimps in the Gombe area, but it was the first within the Park and the first involving a habituated chimp of the research community. We hope very much it will be the last.

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